

Class Struggle

The Workers' Republic Women's Liberation International Socialism

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Group

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Under pressure from backbenchers, military and police chiefs and Ulster loyalists, the British Tories have launched a vicious counter-attack on fundamental democratic liberties in a desperate attempt to cripple the IRA and its base of support in the anti-unionist masses in the north.

Once more the British ruling class is using Ireland as an excuse to sharpen the weapons of reaction for future use against internal opposition. Fundamental democratic rights, the gains of generations of struggle, are being torn up with little more than a bleat of protest from the official leaders of the working class movement.

They open their mouths only to protest that the measures "will not be effective" or to blame the IRA for making them "necessary". But they themselves are ultimately part of the target that Thatcher has in mind for these new powers if ever they cannot control and choke the struggles of the mass of workers who give them their position.

Thatcher is directing her offensive not only against the Republican movement but against all those who in any way support it in its fight with British imperialism in Ireland. Clearly the stepped up killing of soldiers by the IRA offensive in the summer of 1988 gave her the concrete excuse for these draconian measures, but that does not make it legitimate for any labour movement body to tolerate in any way this denial of democratic rights to any Republican fighter or supporter—whatever their criticisms of the IRA.

War-time Measures

In fact the stepped-up IRA attacks have blown to smithereens the lying propaganda from Thatcher that the Anglo-Irish Agreement, extradition, and determination by the security forces (that is, ambushes and murder by SAS squads) could isolate and destroy the IRA because they were merely a bunch of criminals. And the reason why the IRA cannot be written off in that way is that, however counter-productive their methods, they represent the continued open revolt of the oppressed nationalist minority in Northern Ireland against British and Unionist rule. Twenty years of the struggle should leave no thinking person in any doubt about this political fact. Thatcher concedes as much by hinting that war-time measures are justified by the scale of the IRA threat.

Thatcher has struck at the Republicans by ending a suspect's right to silence, once the cardinal principle of bourgeois law which, correctly, put the onus on the prosecution to prove guilt. Now, silence, as the Winchester trial so dramatically demonstrated, will be taken as open admission of guilt.

On the grounds of their support for the IRA, Sinn Féin have been banned from the airwaves and television. The "oxygen of publicity"—that is the democratic right even of

elected representatives to argue for their political views has been taken away from them. The masses' "right to know" has also been abruptly terminated in the exigencies of protecting imperialist and bourgeois rule in Ireland.

This flagrant political censorship of Sinn Féin will also exclude from the media anyone who in any way supports the political views of the Republican movement. But the lovers of "law and order", "peace" and "democracy" do not intend to stop there. On the cards is the introduction of some form of selective internment.

Clearly what all of these draconian, anti-democratic measures amount to is more than mere cosmetic gestures to placate the foaming in the mouth hysteria in the Tory and Unionist camps. The British ruling class know only too well that Sinn Féin commands a significant base of support in the north. In themselves these measures might not have such great effect upon that support. For them to be effective requires a stepping up of the unabated campaign of the brutal repression by the RUC and British army of Republicans, and especially the youth in Derry, Belfast and elsewhere.

The campaign of repression will now be blanketed in almost total silence from the radio and TV. Those who are lifted and brutalized can now all the more easily be framed if they refuse to incriminate themselves by staying silent. Selective internment when it comes will have the goal of removing the most experienced and hardened leaders within the Republican movement. In this way it is hoped the slow but inevitable process of demoralization will seep through the anti-unionist masses.

Democratic Liberties

We must not let Thatcher's moves go unanswered. The immediate defence of these democratic liberties—won by the struggles by the British and Irish working classes—is an urgent necessity, a matter of life and death to the working class movement in this country.

The defence of democratic rights remains a pious abstraction if we do not actually defend those from whom those rights are being snatched away—the Republicans and their supporters. Failure to act now in their defence will make it doubly difficult to act in our own defence as organized workers and socialists after the ruling class has consolidated its weapons of reaction.

Thatcher's draconian measures of repression are borrowing directly the censorship perfected by the Irish ruling

Political Censorship ... Right to Silence...

DEFEND DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

class in the south in its own prolonged attempt to crush the resistance to partition and national oppression in the North. The protests of Irish bishops and Fianna Fáil spokespersons after the Winchester court handed out 25 years to three young Irish people are evidence of real tensions within the Catholic nationalist bourgeoisie. But it would be disastrous to place any hope in these people or their parties. The function of their verbal protests is entirely to take the steam out of the considerable mass anger. Of course these tensions make them more vulnerable to the pressure of the masses—but only on condition that working class forces are organized around clear demands independently of Fianna Fáil and against it.

Similar rhetoric from opportunists such as Labour

Left Emmet Stagg and De Rossa of the Workers Party, however, must be used to force them to put their feet where their mouths are. The fight must be taken into the ranks of the labour movement and working class communities. In doing so we will find the official leaders an obstacle at every point to any form of defence of democratic rights for Republicans. Therefore we must sharpen our demands on them to force them to mobilize or else be openly exposed for what they are. That is especially true in the media unions and the NUJ.

Open democratic conferences of workers, socialists and republicans must be urgently convened in every town to put together the nucleus of a mass campaign, centred upon workers' action, to fight to:

- Stop Political Censorship of Republicans and their supporters throughout Britain and Ireland. Scrap Section 31!
- Defend the Right to Silence. Innocent until proven guilty! ■
- End Extradition of Irish Republicans to British and Northern Ireland courts
- Release the Birmingham Six, the Guildford Four, the Winchester Three. ■

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● Militant ● Palestine

Scrap Anti-Gay Laws



▲ Duke Street, Derry, 5 October, 1968.

EDITORIAL

SINN FÉIN — LOOKING LEFT AGAIN?

SINN FÉIN'S COURTSHIP of the SDLP and Fianna Fáil has been a major disappointment to their own leadership. Its failure was reflected in the fact that the SF president, Gerry Adams, was forced to publicly respond to criticisms from the left at one of the key events organized by the Derry '68 Committee on the weekend of 7th October. It was a well-attended debate involving Adams, Eamonn McCann (SWM), Michael Farrell and Bernadette McAliskey. Their subject was the lessons of the last twenty years of the anti-imperialist struggle in the north.

The terms of the debate were quickly set by McCann's speech. He argued that the last twenty years of the struggle underlined the need to confront the two exploitative and repressive capitalist, pro-imperialist states in Ireland. Therefore, what was needed was a socialist strategy to mobilize the working class as the central force in driving British imperialism out of Ireland, *simultaneous* with the fight to overthrow capitalism, north and south. He concluded that any belief in a stageist position — first a 32-county capitalist Ireland, then the struggle for socialism — peddles illusions in some kind of pan-nationalist unity with the SDLP, Fianna Fáil and the southern ruling class. Stageism meant rejecting in the here and now the need to mobilize the victims of that class's social, economic and political policies. There could be no national independence short of a socialist Ireland.

In replying to McCann's powerful speech, Adams failed to directly confront his central point about the bankruptcy of a stageist position. While claiming that Sinn Féin had no illusions in Charlie Haughey or any form of pan-nationalism, he asserted the central importance of the demand for "Irish self-determination" for any strategy — "We will never get socialism until we have got the end of partition" and "The demand [for self-determination] was capable of driving a wedge between Fianna Fáil and its own roots, between rhetoric and reality".

To that end, he argued that it was now necessary (why only now?) to build a mass national campaign of the oppressed and exploited behind a charter of social, economic and political demands under the slogan for national self-determination.

Adams' reply clearly signals that Sinn Féin are deeply disappointed by the results of their efforts to build a pan-nationalist alliance with the SDLP, Fianna Fáil etc. But have they in any sense altered the purely nationalist limits of their political strategy and the inherent stageism that goes with it? The idea of a mass movement under a nationalist banner subsuming workers' demands and workers' "economic rights" is nothing new politically in the programme and propaganda of Sinn Féin. Whether Adams genuinely means, however, to fight to actually mobilize mass forces on such a basis remains to be seen. That would represent a change of tactics but it would not represent in itself any break with pan-nationalism. Indeed it would merely add a populist dimension to Sinn Féin's nationalism — seeking to achieve the pan-nationalist front *from below* rather than by appeals to the parties of constitutional nationalism.

If they were to be serious about exposing the contradictions between the rhetoric and reality of Fianna Fáil and the southern ruling class they would have to start from the class nature of Irish society and the class interest of constitutional nationalism in supporting imperialism. What more effective wedge could be driven between Fianna Fáil and the mass of workers with illusions in it than to mobilize the southern working class, women, youth and oppressed masses to really confront the attacks on their living conditions and democratic rights?

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A charter of aspirations can never be a guide to such a mobilization. A focussed action-programme is needed. But if the needs of the labouring masses are to be successfully fought for, the struggle *must* run up against the reality of the capitalist system and the capitalist state in the south. The struggle *must* therefore be explicitly linked to the overthrow of the system and the smashing of both states. Anything less will sacrifice the needs of the *class struggle*, limiting it to terms compatible with the survival of the bourgeois nationalists so as, supposedly, to rally them behind the banner of "self-determination". That lifeline to the bourgeoisie is the stageism of Sinn Féin's programme and remains the key to its political impotence in the south.

The Armed Struggle An Obstacle

Adams also acknowledged the fact that the Irish left was severely critical of the Republican armed struggle. He correctly stated that the left had an obligation to put forward their alternative. Only Michael Farrell — a leader of the Peoples Democracy up till 1980 — took up the challenge. While not saying whether he supported the IRA's armed struggle in general, he criticized its counter-productive features especially the killing of civilian workers. He argued that what was paramount was a political offensive and the building of mass movements, north and south. Only in that context could an armed struggle become truly effective.

The Irish Workers' Group agree with Farrell, as far as his statement went. Any perspective which makes class action the key to the political offensive must *inevitably* bring an end to the Provisional IRA military campaign which is divorced from the needs of the struggle of the masses. A mass movement would have to transform and subordinate all armed action to meet its needs, and *under its control* through democratic Action Councils.

Any attempt to mobilize the masses successfully, especially in the north, will certainly raise the practical question of their self-defence in the struggle, against imperialism directly, or its agents, and at a certain point also against physical attack organized by the employers. The fight to build united fronts around various tasks of the struggle, involving workplaces and communities, will pose the task of building, training and equipping youth and workers, in workers' and civilian militias, as a key tactic. No revolutionary socialist alternative which fails to argue this perspective can seriously claim to put the fight for a workers state at the centre of its strategy.

That is the answer to Adams' challenge to the left; that is the role we see for armed struggle. But it is an alternative that can only become concrete in so far as it places the *priority* upon fighting to build that mass movement. And at the present moment the Republican armed guerrilla campaign is increasingly a major *obstacle* to that task.

In our fight for a united front of workers, socialists and Republicans — around urgent tasks north and south — we believe Republican militants must be won away from their illusions that the present armed struggle, which is neither controlled by a democratic fighting mass movement nor conducted in relation to its needs, can bring one day nearer the final settling of accounts with imperialism or capitalism in Ireland. ■

THE IRISH WORKERS GROUP is a revolutionary communist organisation. We base our programme and policies on the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, on the documents of the first four congresses of the Third (Communist) International and on the Transitional Programme of the Fourth International.

■ Revolution

Capitalism is an anarchic and crisis-ridden economic system based on production for profit. We are for its replacement by socialist production planned for human need. Only the working class can lead the oppressed masses of the planet towards this goal. To do so requires a social revolution that expropriates the capitalist class and smashes the armed power of that class, namely its state, replacing it with the dictatorship of the proletariat, founded upon workers councils and armed militias of the workers.

■ Reformists

There is no peaceful parliamentary road to socialism. Workers are repeatedly held back from the struggle for power by the social democratic or Labour parties, the trade union bureaucracy and the Stalinist parties. These bodies, while based on workers organisations, are bourgeois in their politics and practice. Their strategy of alliances with the bourgeoisie (popular fronts) inflicts enormous defeats on the working class worldwide. Their history is one of sacrificing the historic aims of the proletariat to reforms within capitalism. In periods of crisis, however, capitalism tries to recoup these concessions.

■ Transitional Programme

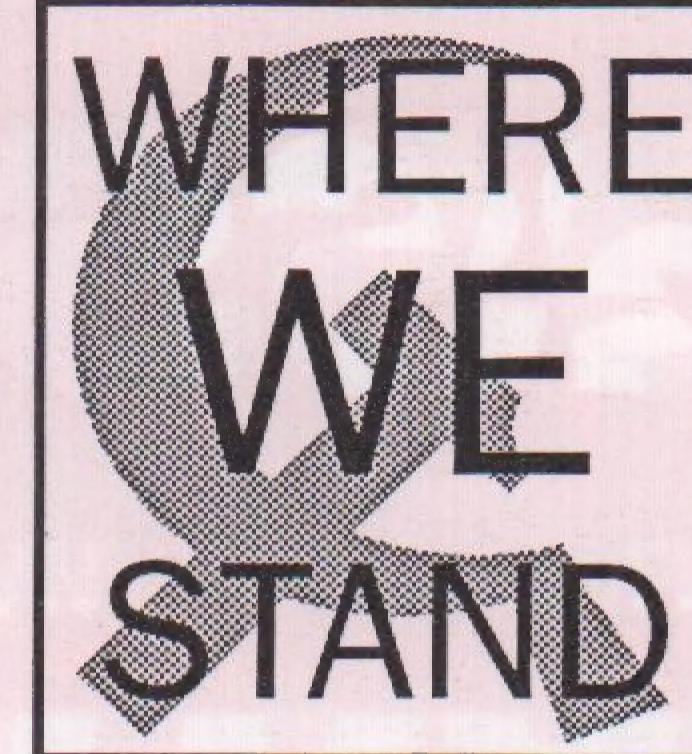
If the working class is to successfully fight the capitalist offensive, its own crisis of leadership must be resolved in a revolutionary direction. To this end we fight within the workers' movements to link existing struggles to the struggle for working class power. We fight for factory committees, industrial unions, international combine committees, unemployed organizations and councils of action — forms of organisation that can bring the workers united into conflict not only with individual capitalists but with the capitalist system. Through transitional demands the masses can find a bridge between their present struggles for everyday demands and the tasks of the socialist revolution.

■ Trade Unions

In the trade unions we fight for a rank and file movement to oust the reformist bureaucracy, to democratise the unions and win them to a revolutionary action programme based on transitional demands. Central to this is the fight for workers' control of production.

■ Stalinist States

The so-called 'communist' countries are in fact *degenerate workers states* ruled by Stalinist bureaucracies. Although capitalism has been overthrown the workers do not hold political power. Their planned economies remain fundamentally hampered by



the existence of a privileged and parasitic bureaucratic caste, thus blocking the road towards socialist development. We defend unconditionally the degenerate workers states against imperialism. To open the road to socialism, we fight internationally to become a force for political revolution within these countries to smash bureaucratic tyranny and to create genuine workers' democracy based on soviets — workers' councils.

■ Imperialism

We support the struggles of oppressed nationalities or countries against imperialism. Within the oppressed countries, where such struggles are led by non-proletarian leaderships the tasks of communists to fight for leadership of the struggle renders our support for such forces conditional as well as critical.

■ Republicanism

In Ireland we defend the revolutionary nationalist Republican movement against imperialist backed repression. The Republican movement which stands at the head of the nationalist revolt repeatedly sets back the possibility of mobilizing the masses by pursuing a strategy of guerrilla warfare without reference to the needs of the masses in struggle.

■ Permanent Revolution

As against their programme we fight for the strategy of *Permanent Revolution*, i.e. an action programme which links the present revolutionary-democratic struggle to the overthrow of both imperialism and Irish capitalism. We therefore fight politically against Republicanism, to bring the struggle under the leadership of the working class and a revolutionary communist party. We advocate the armed united front of workers, socialists and republicans as a tactic in the struggle. We fight to unite the majority of the Irish working class in the struggle for its own state power throughout the island. We fight for maximum unity in the struggle against capitalism with the Protestant working class, while not hid-

ing from them our fundamental opposition to British imperialism.

■ Church & State

We fight for the most complete separation of Church and state, an end to church control of schools, hospitals and other social institutions. We fight against every confessional or sectarian expression in the workers' organisations.

■ Sexual Oppression

We fight against the oppression that capitalist society inflicts on people because of their race, age, sex, or sexual orientation; or on minorities such as the Travellers. We are for the liberation of women and for the building of a working class women's movement, not an "all class" autonomous movement. We are for the liberation of gays and lesbians from their special oppression.

■ Environment

We fight for the working-class action to keep the environment safe for human life against its destruction by the profit lust of capitalism or by bureaucratic Stalinist planning.

■ Internationalism

It is impossible to achieve socialism within a single national territory. The revolution must become international — its fundamental task is its own extension. Therefore, as well as building revolutionary parties, the workers need a revolutionary International. The last, the Fourth, collapsed into centrism between 1948 and 1951 after it failed to elaborate Trotsky's programme for the new world period.

■ New International

The Irish Workers Group is the Irish section of the *Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International*. We are pledged to fight the *centrism* of the degenerate fragments of the Fourth International (Militant, LWR, PD, LWR and IWL in Ireland) and to found a Leninist Trotskyist International through a process of revolutionary regroupment. We combine the struggle for a re-elaborated transitional programme with active involvement in the struggles of the working class — fighting for revolutionary leadership.

■ Join the IWG

If you are a class conscious fighter against capitalism and imperialism and if you are an internationalist — join us!

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THE "PROGRAMME for National Recovery" agreed a year ago between the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and Haughey's Fianna Fáil is continuing to hold despite all the evidence that its promises were a fraud and a lie.

Two years of savage cuts in public sector jobs and spending are enabling the state to curb the growth in its borrowing a little faster than planned, although foreign borrowing as a % of GNP is still not stable. But there is another major factor operating to the advantage of Irish capitalism, at least for the time being. It is the record growth, yet again, in exports—due principally to the continued upturn in the world economy.

The basis for that upturn is a shallow one capable of being rapidly exhausted in the period ahead with a consequent re-

faced with a new round of cuts ... who will lead fightback?

cession in world markets. But for now it is enabling industry in Ireland to use more and more of its slack capacity, increase earnings and profits, and to permit the massive re-patriation of profits out of Ireland by multinational branches without causing any immediate adverse effect on gross production figures and state revenue.

The Central Statistics Office makes it clear, however, that industrial employment is still slowly falling.

JOBS IN INDUSTRY (REPUBLIC)	
1980	256,200
1984	223,100
1985	212,600
1986	208,600
1987	205,700
1988	199,500

The number of redundancies

in the overall workforce, including services, public sector etc. in the past year was larger than the number of new jobs created—25% larger! This is despite all the special job-projects that the Programme was supposedly promoting. Thus the ICTU's claims of "progress" under the Programme is a calculated deception. The only "progress" for which these public-relations agents for Haughey can claim any credit is in the emigration of youth coming into the labour market. This alone is responsible for the tiny net drop in unemployment.

The ICTU-Haughey pact serves one vital purpose—to smooth the path for the cuts. The government's over-performance on this front has allowed

them to present a softer image for their next package of cuts—about £300m instead of the expected £450m. But it is the working class which will bear the brunt. Local authority services are being savagely pruned. In Dublin street lighting, houses, rubbish trucks and parks will be left fall into disrepair as maintenance staff are cut; libraries will close for longer; charges for services will be increased. Hundreds more local authority jobs will be scrapped to add to the 1,000 lost last year.

Nurses came to the brink of industrial action in mid-October but have been brow-beaten into deferring it. Redundancies, work overload and increased reliance upon young student nurses employed on slave

wages have been creating intolerable conditions.

Students vented their anger by breaking through Garda barriers outside the Dáil on the day of its re-opening, the 19th October.

But a unified fighting campaign needs to be built—urgently. Students, local authority workers, nurses, community action groups, tenants, unemployed committees need to be galvanized in a democratically controlled campaign committed to mobilizing mass support around all the sharpest issues posed by the cuts.

The willingness to struggle has been demonstrated time and again even if only in limited actions. The problem of leadership is what is decisive. As

long as the present economic conditions sustain the illusion of more economic growth ahead the ultra-conservative union bureaucracy is as secure as ever in its power to choke the anger of the rank and file and to confuse and demoralize them.

It is therefore the responsibility of socialist and class-conscious militants to take the initiative in building such a campaign through democratic open meetings called to organize around an action programme on the sharpest issues of the day. The IWG on its own cannot undertake that task. But a real step forward could result from a joint initiative with the larger forces of the SWM and Militant.

To make only small progress in the attempt would be infinitely better politically than to languish in abstract and sectarian propaganda, refusing to put ideas to the test of struggle. The needs of the working class make united action urgent.

Nurses lead Strike Wave

FIVE MONTHS after the re-election of "socialist" president Mitterrand, France has been rocked by a wave of protests over wages and conditions, particularly in the public sector where real wages have decreased by ten per cent since 1981.

The strike wave came at a particularly embarrassing moment for "socialist" prime minister Michel Rocard. His government — largely composed of Socialist Party (PS) members, but also including several bourgeois "centrists" — was presenting his budget proposals to parliament, where there is no overall government majority. Responding to the strikes, some PS deputies tried to distance themselves from the government, suggesting that the time had come to make concessions. However the PS leadership, and Rocard in particular, remain unmoved, hoping to ride out the storm. For the moment, his plan seems to be working.

FIRST CHALLENGE

The first major challenge came from the nurses. As in Ireland, French nurses have been at the bottom of the heap for decades. Underpaid and overworked, they were ready to fight. At the beginning of October strike action spread like wildfire through the hospitals, rapidly leading to a national strike. The basic demands were for an across the board pay increase of IR£200 a month and for more jobs. Despite neither of these demands being won, the strike ended after three weeks.

One of the notable features of the nurses strike was the existence of a national rank and file strike committee or "Co-ordination" as it is known. There is no equivalent of the Irish Nurses Organization, and the unions — as is generally the case in France — only organize a very small minority of workers. The nurses' strike therefore had enormous strengths: delegates and strike committees were democratically elected in mass

meetings, and the delegates to the National Co-ordination are accountable to the rank and file.

However, there are also important weaknesses associated with this new and spontaneous form of organization. The most striking problem is that there is no real national strike. Instead, each hospital voted on its own to continue the strike — often on a day-to-day basis. This kind of movement, similar to that organized by the railway workers two years ago, laid the workers wide open to a "back to work" scare mounted by the media. Without a strong national strike, the movement will remain weak, no matter how democratic things might be at the local level. Indeed it was the Co-ordination which decided to call off the strike.

Another important weakness was the refusal of the bulk of the nurses to link up their movement with the rest of the public sector. In France, all state employees (civil servants, electricity, rail, post, hospitals, education) are employed according to the same general contract. Pay and conditions for all these workers have been deteriorating ever since Mitterrand came to power in 1981. It is this possibility of a united public sector fight which has made the government so determined. They say that if they meet the nurses' demands they will have to increase pay for all public sector workers. There is a large amount of truth in this.

As life got back to normal after the long summer break, a series of local disputes broke out in education, post and public transport. Workers throughout the public sector have seen the nurses strike as the spearhead of a movement which could reverse the government's strategy of holding down wages and giving handouts to the capitalists. Despite the nurses' return to work, strikes in the post and public transport are continuing. The situation is obviously ripe for an all-out strike throughout the public sector.

Even the unions sense this, and on October 20th they organized the first united day of action for over four years. However, the nurses' Co-ordination refused to participate, arguing that their action was separate from that of the rest of the public sector. This sectionalism, coupled with the fact that paramedical and ancillary workers are not represented in the national movement, shows that the nurses have yet to break out of their "professional" role.

As for the rest of the public sector, it is not yet clear whether the movement will really take off. The return to work by the nurses — despite their pledge to continue their strike — will not have helped matters. October 20th was only a partial success; around 40 per cent of public sector workers took part, but the Paris march was a somewhat desultory affair, with few railway workers, who have been particularly combative in the past. Further "days of action" have a notoriously demobilizing effect if they are not clearly oriented to more decisive and effective action.

The union leaderships show no sign of calling an all-out strike, but it is quite possible that another initiative as bold as that of the nurses could ignite the whole of the public sector.

There are important lessons to be learned from this movement which is far from finished. Most importantly, workers must rely on their own strength and their own organization, but they also need to be united against the bosses, and armed with a strategy to win. Further, there should be no question of putting our faith in the election of a "socialist" government. A recent opinion poll showed that 59 per cent of French bosses could see no difference between Rocard's policies and those of his right-wing predecessor, Chirac. For once, the ruling class was right. Workers should draw the appropriate conclusion, in France and elsewhere.

Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International

In a leaflet distributed to public sector workers and to nurses, *Pouvoir Ouvrier*, sister group of the Irish Workers' Group, argued for an all-out strike in the whole of the public sector.

"The aim of the bosses is to divide and rule. The union bureaucrats are playing the same game, through a series of separate days of action with no perspective for victory. We must fight to place the unions at the service of the workers. To do this, every one should have their union card; remember, unity is strength! The unions, altogether, must immediately organize:

• An all-out strike of public sector workers to break the wage freeze and put an end to austerity. No more 24-hour strikes which don't

frighten anybody!

• Mass meetings in every workplace to decide strike action, to create the organizational forms we need to win: sovereign mass meetings; recallable strike committees; centralization of the strike through a national co-ordination.

• The extension of the movement by sending delegations of strikers into the workplaces to convince other workers to join the movement, in particular in the private sector.

The bosses and the government are trying to encourage sectionalism, "everyone for themselves". In making concessions to the nurses, they'll talk about the "special nature of health workers". What hypocrites, when the 1988 budget gives 222 million francs extra to the army, and 36 million to the

health services! Faced with these manoeuvres, we must say "We are all special cases" and that we are acting in the interests of all workers, because we are all affected by the austerity programme.

• Immediate mass meetings to launch an all-out strike in the public sector!

• Rank and file control of the unions!

• Enforce unity between our unions through respect for mass meetings and a massive unionization campaign!

• United action between public and striking private sector workers!

• Down with the government's austerity programme!

• Restore wages to 1981 levels!"

What our French section argued



▲ Striking French hospital workers

What was the response of the French far left to these events? They were all in favour of mass meetings and National Co-ordinations, but they had no idea of how to deal with union leaders, who, despite the low levels of unionization, nevertheless play a vital role in determining the outcome of any strike. Nor did they see the need to organize united action now in the public sector.

In a leaflet produced for the demonstration on October 20, the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (USFI) didn't mention either the union lead-

The Role of the Left

ers or the need for an all-out strike in the public sector.

As for the Parti Communiste Internationaliste (sister organization of the LWR in Ireland) and Lutte Ouvrière, they were both completely invisible on October 20, as is usually the case, having neither a leaflet nor paper sellers! Their press reveals the same tailist confusion that is shown by the LCR; they have no clear answer to French workers apart from the vague call to fight against austerity.

The same is true for Social-

isme International, sister organization of the SWM. "Follow the nurses example", says their journal which goes on to muse "perhaps the whole of the public sector will be able to profit for the moment by winning pay increases which the government had refused for so long". "Perhaps"! But surely the first task is to clearly explain how to fight, in what way. Even on the most basic demand for an all-out strike in the public sector, the majority of the French left have not been able to see what is necessary. ■

Permanent Revolution & Ireland — Part 3

FOR A SINGLE YEAR in the whole history of the Northern Ireland statelet, the mobilized masses of the nationalist minority took into their own hands the fight against their social and national oppression. That year still stands out in stark contrast both to the episodes of isolated guerrilla action that had preceded it since 1922 and to the republican guerrilla warfare after 1969.

It was a year of crucial political opportunities in which Irish revolutionary socialists were put severely to the test. That test proved them to be politically bankrupt. The subsequent fate of the whole struggle in the north is in part due precisely to the failure of the Irish left to recognize the roots of their mistakes or to learn any of the key lessons.

This third article on *Permanent Revolution and Ireland* investigates the events in the north between Oct. 1968 and the end of 1969—with a view to understanding the key issues of programme, strategy, tactics and organisation which have to be addressed by any group aiming to build a revolutionary communist alternative in Ireland.

The Anti-Unionist Revolt

The year 1968 saw a rapid growth of protest action among nationalists in the sectarian Northern Ireland statelet. It focused especially on issues of housing discrimination, and against Unionist bans on nationalist parades and Republican Clubs. It was against this background that the "Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association" found its banner suddenly a focus for all the political discontents of the nationalists. The first Civil Rights march—there had

already been several rallies—mobilized 2,500 people on the road from Coalisland to Dungannon on 24 August and was followed by riots provoked by Paisley's Protestant Volunteers.

NICRA had been formed on 16 January 1967 after a public meeting in a Belfast hotel. At its core was a group of members of the Stalinist "Communist Party of Ireland" determined to create a cross-class protest campaign to lobby peacefully for a limited

programme of civil liberties. The committee thus embraced figures from the Northern Ireland Labour Party, Republican Labour, the Republican movement and even a co-opted "Young Unionist". Its demands included reform of the local election system and the abolition of emergency legislation and the B-Specials (Ulster Special Constabulary).

NICRA was reluctantly forced by the *Derry Housing Action Committee* (DHAC) to go ahead with the October 5th demonstration in Derry which had been banned by Home Affairs Minister William Craig. The DHAC was the initiative of radical leftists in the local N.I. Labour Party branch, most notably Eamonn McCann who with two others was afterwards charged with organizing that famous march.

Television pictures that day drew the attention of the world to the savagery of the Royal Ulster Constabulary as it batoned the defenceless marchers, including public figures such as Gerry Fitt MP, leaving 96 people in need of hospital treatment.

PEOPLES DEMOCRACY

As an immediate consequence of the Derry events the Peoples' Democracy was created in Queen's University Belfast. Adapting to the semi-anarchist trend then popular world-wide in the student movement, it was a loose organization in which actual decision-making frequently fell to a small unelected circle. It adopted a Civil Rights charter with the addition of several points of a "social programme" on house-building, jobs and farm co-operatives.

The PD had no analysis or perspective; no programme that in any way addressed the immediate needs of the class struggle in general or which recognized the relevance of the national question. Nor did it point out any road towards socialist struggle.

In Derry new middle class elements among the Catholics moved swiftly to damp down the spirit of revolt among the Catholic majority of the city. Ivan Cooper, John Hume and others created the Citizens' Action Committee, and the radical left effectively

dissolved into it. Left activists who warned against the CAC had no tactics to develop independent action and organization.

The two months following the dam-burst of October 1968 witnessed unprecedented mass demonstrations under the banner of Civil Rights—several in Derry of up to 15,000, and 5,000 at Armagh. Paisley led provocative counter-demonstrations with the encouragement of Craig's racist anti-Catholic speeches. Scuffles and stone-throwing between the two sides occurred repeatedly. Sit-down protests continued the agitation.

Prime Minister O'Neill was forced to make concessions. On 22 Nov. he announced his acceptance in principle of a points system for allocating houses, the appointment of an Ombudsman, an end to the business vote and a review of the Special Powers Act, plus a Development Commission for Derry to replace the loyalist-packed Corporation. On the 28th Stormont passed an Electoral Law abolishing the University seats and the business vote in Parliamentary elections. But the general question of the local government franchise was left to a two-year review perspective.

The Derry CAC and NICRA controlled and led most marches—apart from PD actions. On 9 Dec. O'Neill broadcast a powerful appeal for popular support. NICRA called a "truce"—no marches or demos for a period. In Derry the CAC pledged to discontinue marches until Jan 11.

FREE DERRY

The PD decided on a Civil Rights march from Belfast to Derry on 1 Jan. The powers at Stormont decided to permit it because it was to be small. But on 4 Jan. the marchers arrived in Derry covered in blood having been beaten up repeatedly by loyalist thugs with police assistance. Derry was inflamed. After the city had quietened down a mob of police invaded the Catholic Bogside area, broke into houses and beat up citizens. The mass anger on the following day resulted in the first barricades and the declaration

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of Bogside as "Free Derry".

The police were told to stay out of the area, and they did, for 5 days during which vigilante groups patrolled the barricades and the left controlled a local "Radio Free Derry, the Voice Liberation". But the left had no definite plan of action and the CAC emerged from the shadows to take advantage of the growing nervousness in the area. They had the barriers taken down overnight on the fifth day.

A POLITICAL WATERSHED

Week after week for the first eight months of 1969 saw mobilisations of nationalists often involving many thousands in an ongoing battle for electoral and housing reform and an end to repression. It was a period of mass direct-action which was to quickly fracture the Unionist Party and force it inch by inch towards meeting the Civil Rights demands.

On 15 Jan. O'Neill had announced a high-level independent commission to investigate the disturbances, and from that point onwards the right-wing of his party organized against him. Their challenge forced him to call a new Stormont general election on 24 February. It was a watershed in the nationalist camp. PD got 23,645 votes in 8 constituencies, but no seats, with Michael Farrell winning 2,310 against O'Neill (7,745) and

Paisley (6,331). Bernadette Devlin took 5,812 votes for PD. McCann stood as an independent in Derry where John Hume took a nationalist seat, as did Ivan Cooper—the future architects of the SDLP which was to consign the old Nationalist Party to the bin.

The Unionists held their own, as did the two NILP and two Republican Labour. On April 2nd Bernadette Devlin, a unity candidate of all the pro-Civil Rights forces, took the Westminster seat in the Mid-Ulster by-election. Although her programme was a pan-nationalist fudge the election results showed the scale of radical support that was there for the left to consolidate.

Several loyalist bombs had damaged public utilities over the preceding weeks and 1,000 part-time Specials were mobilized. At Easter there were unusually large crowds (6,000 in Derry and 2,500 in Armagh) at Republican commemorations of the 1916 Rising. Significant rioting, originating in response to Loyalist provocations and police attacks, led to the sending in of 500 new British troops on 23 April. They were not to be deployed in areas of strife but would relieve the police by protecting installations. NICRA and the Derry Citizens' Action Committee used this atmosphere to justify a continued "pause" on demonstrations.

The right-wing challenge to Captain O'Neill's concessions, which had led to the general election, gradually developed into a backlash—forcing him to resign. This



▲ Start of civil rights march to Derry on 5 October 1968.

The Northern State — A Prison House

The events of 1968 to 1969 are often presented as the shattering of the Unionist political monolith in the Six County state—which is indeed the case. But they were also the shattering of another monolith which represented a double subjection for the mass of nationalist workers and small farmers—the monolith of Catholic Church control in every aspect of the life of the Six-County nationalist minority. This began to take shape from the beginning of the 19th century.

Side by side with the development of the sectarian loyalist bloc, the weak and encircled sections of the nationalist bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie in the north-east relied upon the Catholic Church to assert their national identity and their narrow class interests. The church hierarchy, with its powerful bishops and its thousands of clergy, became an unrivalled force in uni-

fying and governing the Catholic community.

Modest proposals by British Liberals for non-sectarian education in the north were fiercely opposed, not only in schools but in higher education. The hospitals were parcelled out and managed as bastions of a Catholic social power which aimed to rival that of the state. And in conditions of appalling housing and joblessness, large impoverished Catholic families were fertile ground for a meagre but enveloping system of Catholic social welfare. Bitter conflicts broke out over issues of control as between the Catholic Church and the Protestant state in education and health.

It was an openly anti-socialist, anti-woman and generally reactionary alliance, therefore, which ruled within the nationalist minority. The church hierarchy, with its powerful bishops and its thousands of clergy, became an unrivalled force in uni-

upon sectarian lines, and the leading Catholic organs, the *Derry Journal* and the *Irish News* were little better than gazettes for the Vatican, the bishops and the Catholic "Nationalist Party". The nationalist minority within the northern state were insulated as completely as was possible from involvement with that state.

The Welfare State

From the end of the 1940s the development of the British "Welfare State" began to weaken the foundations of Catholic social power in the north. Increasingly the mass of ordinary nationalists were drawn into dealing with the state as the provider of elementary needs—the National Health Service, improved educational provision, and social welfare—especially improved unemployment benefits. Slowly the basis of Catho-

lic hegemony over its "community" was being undermined.

The masses' growing reliance on and links with the welfare state were principally via the local authorities—precisely where sectarian discrimination operated most systematically against nationalists. Local authorities thus became the focus of a growing nationalist sense of grievance against their oppression.

The old requirement of house-ownership as the precondition of having a vote in local elections had not been abolished in the North. The system awarded more than one vote to some citizens on the basis of their rateable property—the "business" vote. When eventually it was brought into line with Britain after 1968 the local government electorate increased leapt from 694,483 to 1,032,694.

Though undemocratic towards Protestant and Catholic alike, this class-based system operated worst against the more impoverished nationalists. But it was surpassed by the crude gerrymandering of electoral divisions which allocated a minority of the seats to the wards of the nationalist majority in Derry. The power of local authorities to allocate housing on a sectarian basis was perfected in Derry where delegation of powers by a contrived Protestant majority meant that houses were ultimately allocated, without any accountability and in secret, by a single "loyal" official—the Mayor.

Misery was not confined to Catholic workers, however. For the majority of Protestant workers and small farmers conditions were no better than for the generality of their Catholic brothers and sisters. The highest unemployment and emigration, and the worst

housing in the UK along with the smallest rate of increase in housing stock, made "Northern Ireland" the cess-pit of British capitalism. And in the 1950s and 1960s a common sense of class exploitation among sections of Protestant and Catholic workers led to a modest growth of support for the admittedly conservative "Northern Ireland Labour Party" and "Republican Labour" candidates.

Confronting the Northern State

Of decisive importance in understanding the northern state is the fact that it was founded upon a systematic social oppression of its internal minority on the basis of their nationality—their identification with Irish nationalism and its goal of a united Ireland. Whatever social force would lead, therefore, in confronting the ugliest features of this prison-house statelet, would

decision was announced on 28 April, and when Major Chichester-Clarke took over on 3 May it was yet another excuse for the weak-kneed Civil Rights reformers to hoist the white flag in the name of giving the new cabinet "a chance."

IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

The turbulent season of loyalist street demonstrations culminated in the Apprentice Boys march in Derry on August 12th. The preceding two weeks had seen mob attacks in West Belfast—by up to 1,000 loyalists at times—and the preparation of barricades. Troops moved into police headquarters on stand-by. In Derry the Republican Club convened a self-appointed "Derry Citizens Defence Association" (DCDA) of two delegates from the major organizations. John Hume's Citizens' Action Committee also joined it—in order to use its platform to appeal for peace at a public meeting of 1,000 on 10th August.

The Defence Association was thus to be the *de facto* leadership in Derry in the weeks ahead. But it did little or nothing to promote disciplined and democratic self-organization of the masses. In no sense did it act as an organ of the masses. It resigned itself to "inevitable" conflict with the Apprentice Boys demonstration. It ensured that the materials were made ready to barricade the vulnerable Bogside area but it had not won the influence to control the Catholic youths who, on 12th of August, responded

▼ Peoples Democracy attacked by Loyalists en route to Derry, 1969.



with stone throwing to the taunts of the Loyalist coat-trailers.

The ensuing battle with the police set the whole province alight. For three days stones and petrol bombs rained down on the repeated forays of the RUC who replied with endless tear gas. The police were driven back and demoralized. Their officers had to use physical force to prevent weeping and hysterical policemen from running away from the fight. B-Specials were mobilized to replace the regular police—carrying pick-handles and cudgels, but before they could be used the British government ordered the withdrawal of these hated security forces of the Six County state and put its own troops on the streets in the guise of peacekeepers.

Meanwhile the nationalist masses had moved in solidarity with Derry in Dungannon, Dungiven and Newry. Their demonstrations were met by loyalist attacks. RUC stations in nationalist areas were attacked.

In West Belfast barricades were erected. There matters quickly became far more dangerous than in Derry. Loyalist crowds massed against the Catholics in the streets. On August 14th houses in several Catholic streets were burned down by attackers, and police patrolled the area firing Browning submachine guns indiscriminately from their vehicles. 200 Catholic homes were burned, 10 Catholics killed and 100 wounded in the two-day police attack on the slums of West Belfast. Troops were put in place on the evening of the 15th.

ARMS FOR NORTH?

In the course of the battle the Dublin Government appealed for a "United nations peacekeeping intervention". In the subsequent days Jack Lynch made a display of mobilizing 2,000 reserves but merely to head off spontaneous mass action in defence of the anti-Unionist ghettos. The southern army was confined in effect to sealing the border against such actions and setting up camps for the many refugees who fled the north.

In Dublin masses demonstrating outside the British embassy were baton-charged by the Gardai. Throughout the south there was a tide of pro-nationalist mass anger, but no political force to channel it. Indeed, even the radicals in the fray in the north themselves had done little to win organized solidarity apart from a spontaneous appeal for help in a *Telefís Eireann* interview during the Battle of the Bogside.

THE TROOPS

In Derry the Defence Association only now drew in representatives of streets and areas, but still had no orientation to the workplaces or organized workers, and still no open democratic methods of self-organisation! Incredibly, no link-ups had been created with defence organizations even in Belfast.

The radicals began to lose the loyalty of the youth who turned to the traditional

Republicanism that was welling up to fill the vacuum of leadership with its promise of armed guerrilla action against British rule in Northern Ireland. The IRA began steadily to recruit the youth throughout the north.

The Defence Association spelt out its demands to the "peacekeeping" troops. The barricades would remain until Stormont was abolished, the B-Specials disbanded etc. However, no demand was raised to withdraw the troops. Bernadette Devlin from the start had railed against any trust in the troops, but the left was no less confused than the masses as to how to counteract what was evidently the real purpose of the troops.

This was a disastrous weakness. Far from coming to the "aid" of the nationalists the troops were a strategic weapon of re-imposing order without fundamentally altering the sectarian state. Many of the limited demands of the movement would soon be

met—the scrapping of the B-Specials and disarming of the RUC (recommendations of the Hunt Report on Oct 9th) but the masses were to be steadily demobilized as the radical leaders floundered in confusion.

The Labour Government's Home Affairs Minister, James Callaghan, was greeted by the nationalist masses of Derry as a champion when he visited the Bogside with flowery promises, strengthening the hand of the Humes and Coopers who soon had some of the barricades dismantled.

In Belfast, by mid-September Bishop Philbin was able to talk down the barricades and parade himself through the Falls Road on an army landrover in his ecclesiastical robes.

The illusions among ordinary nationalists in the immediate role of the army was understandable. But the confused response of the "revolutionary left" to the troops—in

Ireland and in Britain—and their impotence when faced with the extraordinary events of August 1969, revealed the political bankruptcy of the groups and organizations which claimed to be the modern representatives of revolutionary communism.

This failure of leadership helped open the door to the eventual re-instatement of a new bourgeois Catholic leadership increasingly able to control and demobilize the nationalist masses; but it also allowed the diversion of the most combative nationalist youth into a guerrilla struggle which would relegate the masses to the sidelines.

Both of these newly re-created forces, despite their profound antagonism to each other, shared a determination to limit the struggle within a narrow nationalist programme hostile to the class struggle and opposed to the perspective of making the revolution permanent—for a Workers' State in Ireland. ■

The Lessons of 1968

AT A RECENT meeting in Derry on the lessons of October 1968 Eamonn McCann (SWM) stated that, as the left had no party and no forces at its disposal, it inevitably failed to play a part in the shaping of events. He therefore excused himself and the SWM from having to argue what ought to have been the response of those like himself who opposed the bourgeois nationalists. It was their elementary duty to attempt to provide a concrete and politically independent line of march for the working class.

The fact that the left did not directly control any forces should not have ruled out an independent line of action. Both in terms of demands, social forces and organization there were clear alternatives which it was vital for the left to fight for. They needed to agitate and make propaganda especially in the factories and workplaces and in the working class communities. The action-goal of immediate all-out strike action was vital.

In Derry after October 1968 they needed to openly challenge the self-appointed

CAC leadership and fight to call it to account by constantly arguing for open democratic public meetings to determine the programme of action and elect a recallable leadership. They needed to openly argue for workers' strike action, for the creation of community and factory action committees and for the centralizing of these in an Action Council.

One of the key tasks for militants was to fight for town and area Action Councils to prepare, organize and train detachments of the youth and workers as defence militias.

This task was urgent from the moment of the first attacks on Civil Rights demos—i.e. it was always a priority in 1968-69.

The left needed to fight for delegates and flying pickets to be sent to workers across the province and throughout the south for solidarity action.

And in addition to "one person one vote", the ending of gerrymandering, lifting of bans on Republican organisations, the abolition of emergency laws and of the Specials etc., the left forces throughout 1968 urgently needed to raise class demands.

It was vitally important to keep always to the for the fight for a massive schemes of public works to create jobs for all the unemployed under trade union control, including the building of houses for all. Similarly for the opening

● ● ● Continued on p. 6

or Irish Nationalists

Inevitably kindle a national struggle, fuelled by the masses' hope for (and illusions in) a united Ireland as the solution to their oppression. It was precisely this that the "revolutionary" left in Ireland and its international mentors, incredibly, refused to recognize in the 1960s—for reasons which are examined separately in this feature.

It is possible that some aspects of this sectarian state could have been modified by Unionism itself—such as reform of local government—and that the loyalist backlash could have been effectively controlled in the process. Indeed, the Catholic nationalist middle classes would have been happy to settle for limited political reforms to guarantee their place in the sun. Thus they would do all in their power to limit the mass movement to peaceful agitation for ill-motivated political reforms.

But discrimination against the mass of the Catholic working class was too large in scale and too materially entrenched to ever be erased by political reforms. This was doubly true in a dependent and backward capitalist province of an imperialist power increasingly faced with its own internal crisis of profitability.

Indeed, the Unionist class alliance depended directly on the system of anti-nationalist discrimination and of marginal privileges for its "loyalists". Any attempt to genuinely democratize the northern state would therefore challenge its whole foundations.

A revolutionary offensive against the northern state, however, would not, in itself, end the misery of the oppressed nationalist working class and small farmers. Discrimination against the mass of Catholic workers, espe-

cially in employment and housing, was but one local feature of their exploitation by Irish and British capitalism. That exploitation was fully shared by their protestant working class brothers and sisters.

However, the discrimination suffered by the Catholic working class was far more sharply felt as a grievance than the common exploitation of Protestant and Catholics. It was almost inevitable that struggle against this class-based system would begin as a democratic revolt, for equality, against discrimination.

Such an analysis of the northern state should have pointed to definite programmatic conclusions for revolutionary socialists in the 1960s. Agitation for democratic rights in the north had to explicitly take account of the nationalist aspirations for a United Ireland.

Most important, it had to confront their illusions in nationalism. It could not do this without explicitly arguing for the completion of the Irish national struggle—but under working class leadership. No other force had the consistent need or ability to carry through the necessary challenge to the existence of both of the Partition states. Nothing less could dissolve the divisions in both nation and class.

But equally, socialists had to argue that real democratic rights of equality could not be achieved for the minority without fighting to end the common exploitation of both Catholic and Protestant workers. Hence it was necessary to fight for demands that addressed the sharpest features of their common exploitation—for an end to unemployment, one person one job and for a programme of massive public works to create jobs and houses for all.

Socialists had to confront the reality—borne out in every decade in this century—that the majority of Protestant workers would not be broken from their loyalism, and

their own complicity in discrimination against Catholics, simply by joint economic struggle. To pretend otherwise would be to ignore political reality and leave the Catholic working class prey to a resurgence of a spontaneous nationalism which would have no truck with any class programme. A working class leadership and action programme among the nationalist minority in their revolutionary democratic struggle—and a fight that used working class action—would inevitably open up a conflict along class lines against the nationalist bourgeoisie and all those sections of the Republican petty bourgeoisie not prepared to fall in behind the workers. This was and remains the only hope of appealing to the more advanced sections of the Protestant working class.

But such a programme could not limit itself to the Six Counties! The working class majority in the south also shared the powerful sentiment for a united Ireland. As argued in the previous two articles in this series, their own class interests were bound up with all facets of Ireland's subordination to imperialism. The oppression of the northern minority and the sectarian and geographical division of the working class had to be a central issue for all socialist propaganda among workers in the south.

In the 1960s the much more rapid development of the south led to a growth in the working class, in its confidence, and also in its militant vanguard. In the decade before 1968 a serious concern with the scientific analysis of Irish society and with issues of programme could have powerfully equipped the small circles of revolutionary socialists to give a real political lead in the subsequent events. Certainly the forces were there to be mobilized on the Irish left—and were searching for leadership.

As events showed, however, the "revolutionaries"—who spent their lives preparing for such situations as 1968—failed the challenge of the whole period abysmally. The recognition of this, and of why, remains vital to any new attempt to-day to prepare for the period ahead. ■

The Lessons of 1968 . . .

of the books of the Councils and all its committees to delegates of the working class organizations.

Organization and Defence Crucial

For four whole months after the riots that followed Easter 1969, physical conflict was an everyday reality for nationalist communities and for almost every protest action. Police tried to impose bans and loyalists engaged in counter-actions, provocative demonstrations and organized attacks on nationalists. Yet there was only the most minimal attempt at organized self-defence—vigilante groups initiated by the clergy in west Belfast to keep drunks out of the clutches of the RUC.

Defence was not only an issue at critical moments when physical attacks threatened the mass movement—it was basic to the everyday morale and progress of the movement. In the absence of organized democratic mass defence the most energetic sections of youth were diverted into frequent stone-throwing, initiating street-fights with the police and responding to the taunts of reactionary loyalist marchers. Not only did that invite reprisals for which they were not prepared but it disrupted the ability of the movement to demonstrate, to bring out mass support on the streets—

and, not least, to counteract the growing inflammation of inter-community sectarian bitterness and hostility.

Ignoring the Political Reality

The Civil Rights leadership was terrified by the new forces unleashed and, along with Hume & Co., focussed their condemnations on the Peoples Democracy group for their "provocative" actions. PD's marches and pickets in many instances were little better than stunts, however heroic, but the condemnations of the CPers, liberals and petty-bourgeois nationalists were in reality aimed against any militant action. PD was, far and away, the most important single source of radical initiative during most of the year but it had no programme or perspective, and no orientation to the working class. It did not fight for the disciplined self-organization of the masses and their self defence through any form of democratically controlled action councils.

Not until the end of 1969 was PD to even attempt to give its programme a broader socialist character when the Civil Rights banner had almost disappeared in the heat of struggle. But even then PD remained blind to the vital importance of the national question and the strategy and tactics that would be necessary to deal with resurgent nationalism.

As yet the involvement of the IRA in the agitation was a fiction created by the extreme Unionists and security chiefs for black propaganda purposes. On 6 Feb. IRA chief Cathal Goulding denied any involvement. His claims of marginal Republican involvement were first made only after the Battle of the Bogside in August 1969.

The IRA had not been revived since it went to ground and atrophied in 1962. But the question of *national* oppression was a fundamental reality in the conflict, however reluctant any of the leaderships were to face up to it concretely in their programmes. Some of the NICRA leadership were condemned by Republicans for pledging their loyalty to the constitutional framework of the Northern State. It was, predictably, left to the hypocritical nationalist rhetoric of Fianna Fáil's Neil Blaney and Dublin prime minister Jack Lynch to blame "Partition" as the root of the problem!

Wider Solidarity

As on the question of defence little had been done by August 1969 to fight to prepare militants across the country for any organized response to developments in the north. Despite localized spontaneous strikes by workers in response, no elements of a solidarity campaign had been built in the all-Ireland working class. Hardly surprising when no fight had been seriously attempted to make workers' action in the North itself a weapon in the fight for

the most burning demands in the preceding year.

In the event, an action programme to chart a way forward should have included the fight for immediate indefinite strike action by nationalist workers and other workers in solidarity; for the barricading of the entire nationalist areas; and for the sending of pickets and delegates throughout the country—and Britain—to win solidarity action. In the south such an action programme should have included the fight for all-out indefinite strike action; the seizure of British-owned factories and banks and their occupation; for the organizing of material aid for the anti-Unionist communities.

An especially important focus for agitation in the south—where there was widespread unrest among many, including soldiers—was to call for soldiers committees to refuse to seal the border and to take up the call for the opening of the arsenals for "arms to the north". It was vital to warn against the bogus republicanism of Fianna Fáil, to underline its real intention to use the army to defend partition against the rising masses. The temperature of the masses in the south posed many other important tactical questions which revolutionaries had not prepared for and did not now address, e.g. the united front and the citizen's militia.

Even a small nucleus of an organization that began to openly address the all-Ireland working class along the lines of such an *action programme* would have become a real focus for the best militants.

But much more was needed to cope with the powerful forces and events that were about to be unleashed. A small organization would be completely at sea without a strategy and tactics that recognized *national* oppression and posed its solution as a series of concrete tasks for the working class, women and anti-imperialists. McCann dismisses this elementary Marxist task as creating abstract blueprints.

The Solutions of McCann and the Militant

Eamonn McCann, freely admits the political failure of the left in 1968. But in his new-found allegiance to the SWM he draws the wrong "lesson" as to what should have been done. In "Socialist Worker" no. 51 he concludes his review of 1968 (*The Left without a Party*):—"Nobody in 1968 pointed a clear way forward to a socialist Ireland."

Instead of arguing what would have been a clear way forward, he claims:

The realistic possibility we did have and didn't take, was of recruiting relatively rapidly from the masses of angry, urgent working class youth whom we had helped bring onto the streets, and perhaps entering 1969 with a revolutionary socialist organisation a few hundred strong.

But recruited to what politics? "Revolutionary socialism" is merely an abstraction. If an action programme is not hammered out and fought for which can *prepare and lead* rather than react to and *trail* the masses. His analysis reflects not what was needed in 1968 but the politics of the SWM today—the refusal to openly argue for what is objectively necessary to prepare militants to *initiate* real resistance by the working class, women and anti-imperialists. McCann dismisses this elementary Marxist task as creating abstract blueprints.

But McCann's refusal to face concrete questions of programme for a living mass struggle flows also from a retrospective pessimism about the potential for working class action in 1968-69. In his review of that year for SWM his argument constantly comes back to the theme of:

the deep-rootedness of sectarianism, the extent to which people in places like the Bogside think "naturally" in communal rather than class-terms... This is not to argue that if we

had all been hardened revolutionaries working clear-mindedly to build a revolutionary socialist party things would have worked out differently.

But surely the point is that "clearmindedness" is not enough, that perhaps the question of an action programme is crucial for an effective leadership? The fact of the left without a programme is what explains why the left remained without a party, despite the existence of hundreds of subjectively revolutionary activists.

Even with the fight for the best action programme that could be worked out to link the immediate struggle to a perspective of permanent revolution, the left in 1968 might not have become a significant factor in the situation. Not having developed and tested a revolutionary programme in struggle, however, no positive lessons could be learned, as the example of McCann so ably demonstrates.

Organizational Solutions

Like McCann the analysis of *Militant* (no.135, Oct. '88) arrives at an abstract organizational "solution" which equally ignores the important programmatic questions.

In 1969 *Militant* in Britain called for the removal of the barricades and the formation of a joint Protestant-Catholic trade union defence force. Equally abstractly now in 1988, their Irish section argues that the strategy that was needed in 1968 was ... the building of the Northern Ireland Labour Party! ■

▼ Police charge at start of the Battle of the Bogside in Derry.



Irish Trotskyism in 1968

THE ENORMITY of the events of 1968-69 was a supreme test of the politics and methods of revolutionary socialists in Ireland and Britain, at a time of significant growth for their organizations. In that test they were all found wanting. Their failure in 1968 did not lie, as claimed by McCann, in their lack of numbers or experience. It had its roots in the confusion and division over vital questions of programme, strategy and tactics which dogged the "Trotskyist" movement since 1948.

The only healthy nucleus of a revolutionary communist organization in Ireland before 1968 was the Revolutionary Socialist Party. In 1943-45 it recruited strongly in Belfast and supported workers' strikes in the teeth of opposition from the Stalinist CP(NI) which blocked with the unionists against the striking workers. This was part of the CP's collaboration with "democratic" imperialism after Hitler invaded the USSR.

British war-time emergency repressive provisions to the North.

It is a mark of the political collapse of post-war Trotskyism that it was left to the Stalinists in Ireland to initiate any campaign for Civil Rights in Ireland in the 1960s—but of course with anything but a revolutionary perspective.

In the 1960s there existed in Ireland an extension of the British "Socialist Labour League" with several dozen supporters, but it never attempted to address the concrete realities of Ireland in theory or programme. Its sectarianism led it even to ignore the barricades in Derry in 1969 in favour of an abstract commitment to "building a revolutionary leadership in the unions."

The founding of an *Irish Workers Group* by Gerry Lawless in late 1965 in London led to a new attempt at a Trotskyist re-birth in Ireland. It created branches in Dublin and Belfast in 1967 and brought together many of the activists who went on to create the groups that exist today—after it, too, fell apart.

Its key weakness was the failure to re-analyse Irish society, politics and economy, and the Northern state, in a new period of change; and the failure to re-apply to Ireland the insights of the Leninist-Trotskyist tradition on national struggles.

Trotsky's theory and programme of *Permanent Revolution* thus remained a dead letter for them. Instead they adapted in a crude empirical way to the superficial appearances, for it seemed that economic development in Ireland was steadily dissolving away the old divisions and antagonisms which characterized the Northern state.

Poverty of Programme

This extreme theoretical weakness dogged all the groupings and activists which sprang from the old IWG. By the time the IWG was formally terminated in May 1968 (having split partly over questions of Ireland's relation to imperialism) its best elements had created a *League for a Workers Republic* which—only Trotskyist group in the South until 1971. (Three of

today's centrist groups sprang from its breakup in that year).

One fragment of the old IWG was instrumental in creating, on October 7th 1968, the *Peoples Democracy* group which was ultimately to squander the enormous socialist potential of the explosion in the North.

Meanwhile the League built a significant periphery of youth, especially in Dublin, and benefited from its orientation to the leftward developing trends in the Labour Party. It might have played an important role in the nationalist revolt, despite its programmatic poverty on the question, had there been any serious attempt at regroupment and programmatic debate between itself, the PD and the other active radical elements of the day. That was not to happen, however, not least because of the opportunism of an influential international grouping—the International Socialists—which has since indelibly stamped its methods on the Irish left in the form of the *Socialist Workers Movement*.

Internationalism Betrayed

Tony Cliff's I.S. (now the British SWP) was at that time a relatively large organization with incomparably greater resources than the Irish groups and close contacts with McCann, the PD, the LWR and militants such as Bernadette Devlin. It could have played an important role in assisting revo-

lutionaries on the Irish left. How did it discharge its internationalist obligations?

The truth is that it opportunistically trailed the semi-anarchist politics of the PD group. Cliff's IS created a solidarity front in Britain—the Irish Civil Rights Solidarity Campaign—whose programme it explicitly limited to the demands of the PD group, as explained in their National Committee minutes on 2nd June 1969:

"Comrade Palmer reported that the ICRSC set up to draw left organisations and Irish groups together to mobilise Irish workers on a programme similar to PD's in Ireland."

"Comrade Lever wanted to know what had become of our demand for a united Socialist Ireland in the campaign programme. Comrade Cliff said that the programme of the ICRSC was that of the PD, which is the only really meaningful organisation in N.Ireland at the moment."

It was the sending in of British troops on August 15th 1979, however, which revealed in the sharpest way the shallow political opportunism of the Tony Cliff International current. In April 1969 when 500 troops were sent in, essentially to take pressure off the police and to guard installations, the IS had no difficulty in proudly headlining—*Ulster: British Troops Out* (SW no. 119, 26/4/69).

● ● ● Continued on p. 7

Irish Trotskyism in 1968

Continued from page 6

However, when troops were put on the streets in response to the conflagrations of August 1969 the IS dropped the demand for Troops Out! Small-print warnings against illusions in the troops, yes, but their action-slogans did not go beyond the demands posed by the Derry Citizens Defence Association as the condition for taking down the barricades.

In the face of opposition to dropping the call for "troops out" the Cliff leadership held firm and had their line endorsed by an IS conference. In September, still under pressure, they published a centre-page defence of their line entitled: *N.Ireland: Fine Slogans and Grim Reality; The Contradictory Role of British Troops Gives Catholic Workers Time to Arm Against Further Orange Attacks* (SW 18th Sept 1969).

The article attempted to argue the advantages of the deployment of British troops for the Catholics, supposedly protecting them while they rearmed! Ironically, the same issue of their paper carried a news report by Chris Harman showing the real role of the troops—In getting the barricades down!

Far from ever giving a breathing space to the nationalist masses to organise or arm themselves the whole function of the troops from the first moment was to re-inforce the conservative Catholic forces and undermine any independent organization, let alone arming, of the masses.

Chickens Home to Roost

The IS leading body, having trailed the Peoples Democracy group, was somewhat shocked to hear on 20 Oct 1969 that PD was dissociating from Cliff's ICRSC front for "supporting less than revolutionary programmes". The IS leadership adapted to this and argued:

The whole basis of Civil Rights had changed. The emphasis had to be on working class demands, ... which challenged the capitalist system and raised the demand for a Workers' Republic. Similarly the ICRSC had to change. ... we have to be more overtly socialist, in solidarity with PD and not the broad Civil Rights movement.

The IS leadership decided its politics on Ireland and its role in Ireland on the basis of trailing the PD line—which was largely dictated by a confused anarchism! IS's own supporters in PD had little programmatic understanding—thanks to the IS tradition—and had in fact liquidated their small group of revolutionaries in the Young Socialists in Belfast into this anarchist mish-mash. Reports that Eamonn McCann had refused to join the new "more socialist" PD failed to restrain the IS group in its adaptation to the muddle of Irish centrism...

IS's assistance to the Irish left was thus concentrated on the People's Democracy group and deliberately excluded any attempt to promote a tactic of revolutionary regroupment involving also the forces around the LWR. Ultimately the glamour wore off PD as it became a recruiting sergeant for the Provisional Republicans. IS then concentrated on developing its supporters in the LWR milieu to begin constructing an Irish section that IS could rely upon to faithfully reproduce its own economic and tallist politics, the SWM.

Sadly the mistakes were never frankly recognized nor their roots analysed. The urgent tasks of serious programmatic work and regroupment remain dirty words for these inheritors of the defeated left of 1968-69. ■

Israeli Elections

Labour — no friend of the Palestinians

"**I**srael is the only democracy in the Middle East". Or so we are told by Zionism's numerous apologists. But when this democracy goes to the polls on November 1st, over one and a half million Palestinians living under its direct rule will have no right to vote. They are the inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, territories occupied by Israel since 1967. And it is the future of this occupation that has been, without doubt, the key issue in the election campaign.

Israeli society has been shaken by nearly a year of Palestinian revolt, now widely referred to as the Intifada, or 'Uprising'. To the Labour Party, the oldest of the established Zionist parties and partner with the hard-line nationalist Likud in the present National Unity government, the answer is for Israel to end its period of direct rule over the occupied territories. But this does not stem from support for the right of the Palestinians to a state, or indeed to any genuine form of self-determination. It would be impossible to vote for Labour on the grounds that it is socialist. Founded in 1930, and in government from the establishment of Israel in 1948 to 1977, the Labour Party grew up as a direct appendage of one of the principal instruments of Zionist colonial settlement—the Histadrut, or General Confederation of Hebrew Labour. Its policy of *Avodaivrit* in the 1920s and 30s involved organizing a boycott of Arab labour and businesses, driving native Palestinians from employment on the land and in industry and thereby establishing the basis for a Jewish state and a Jewish economy.

Imperialists

Hussein's close links with the US and British imperialists and his massacre of Palestinian fighters in 1970 make him an attractive proposition to Labour as a future overseer of the Palestinians. Yet in July this year, Hussein ended all Jordanian claims to the West Bank, scuppering Labour's key policy just months before the election, so Labour are now calling for a form of election on the West Bank to enable the population to select representatives to join a negotiat-

As we go to press, Labour are running neck and neck with their principal rival and coalition partner, the Likud, led by Yitzak Shamir. Formed in 1973 from the old Herut and Liberal parties, Likud is an openly nationalistic and capitalist party. Its first prime minister, Menachem Begin was a leader of the terrorist Irgun gang prior to 1948.

ing team to discuss the future of the territory with the Jordanian government.

Mini-State

Even with tacit PLO support, however, it is impossible to give support to the project of a mini-West Bank state, or vote for Labour because they could negotiate such a state. At best it would be a reservation of cheap labour for Israel. And with the Arab states now taking over the purse strings it would be a slap in the face for all those Palestinians whose land in present-day Israel was stolen from them forty years ago. It would be to abandon the Arab minority within Israel to permanent second-class status in a state not of their choosing.

Nor does the fact that Labour has close links to Histadrut make it any form of working class organization such as for example the Irish Labour Party or the West German SPD, for whom critical support in elections is possible. While claiming to be a trade union, Histadrut in fact is today one of Israel's largest employers and with its own industrial conglomerate construction monopoly and bank. Class conscious workers and progressive intellectuals should not vote for the Israeli Labour Party or give it any form of political support.

Hard-line

Likud attracts its support from oriental Jews whose concentration in lower paid employment has generated resentment towards the institutions of Labour Zionism dominated as they are by the Ashkenazi, that is, the European and American elite. Many oriental Jews regard the increased exploitation of Arab labour as the source of their own upward mobility. They favour a hard-line approach towards the Intifada and no territorial concessions. But the Likud's involvement in the National Unity government and its tentative plan for a restricted form of autonomy on the West Bank have caused a certain hemorrhaging of support from Likud towards the parties of the far right. ■



▲ Voting with his feet... Arab youth braves electric wire to raise the banned Palestinian flag.

PLO — Retreat Imminent

Traditionally the Palestinian Liberation Organization (P.L.O.) have never taken sides in the Israeli elections.

They have had good cause for this. Both Labour and Likud in power have carried out a ruthless and brutal policy of repression symbolized by Labour's Defence Minister Rabin's hard-line policy in putting down the Intifada while sitting in a government under Yitzak Shamir, the Likud Prime Minister. But observers have detected a subtle shift in the P.L.O.'s attitude this year.

Eager to recognize Israel's right to exist, (that is to oppress around 750,000 Palestinians in a confessional capitalist state), the Arafat leadership were keen to avoid embarrassing Labour prior to the election. The Palestine National Congress (PNC) has been postponed to enable the expected proclamation of a powerless Palestinian government in exile to take place after Israelis vote on November 1st. The left wing Israeli paper, Al-Hanishnar, even reports secret talks as having

occurred between the P.L.O. and Labour to arrange this.

Palestinian workers, peasants and small business people have nothing to gain from such conciliationist policies. In the absence of a revolutionary working class party many Palestinian youth, repelled by the P.L.O.'s accommodationist policies, may now turn to the reactionary pan-Islamic organizations who promise a more determined fight against Zionism.

Already a growing force in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the Fundamentalists, if ever successful in establishing an Islamic-Palestinian state, would enforce the oppression of women and totally suppress the democratic rights of workers' organizations. To prevent this outcome, in the shock waves that will inevitably come in the wake of the Israeli election the Palestinian workers must take centre-stage with a direct class appeal to their fellow workers throughout the region.

With an uncompromising resistance to the Israeli occupation, the Zionist monolith can still be shattered. ■

For Information on Abortion
Ring the following numbers :
Dublin (01) 794700 - (01) 680043,
Cork (021) 502848 - Mon. evening,

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Fight Spring's Witch-hunt

THE WITCH-HUNT of Militant supporters in the Irish Labour Party is gathering pace. The October meeting of the party's Administrative Council (AC) voted to dissolve three branches in Dublin West. After no evidence of the malpractice originally alleged against the branches was found, the party establishment then decided to dissolve the branches — three of the most active branches in the constituency — for supposedly being "inactive".

Militant supporters are not even in a majority in all these branches, but the branches were "guilty" of defending Militant leader Joe Higgins' democratic selection for the next elections. Clearly Spring would never countenance a Militant TD. Dissolving the branches has now become part of a drive to expel Militant root and branch. Labour leader, Dick Spring revealed on RTE's Today Tonight programme on October 18, that he wanted Militant out of the Labour Party, and that motions to

expel Militant would go before the party's annual conference in February. At a time of savage cuts, Spring, Desmond, Quinn and Co. want to conduct their sham opposition to Fianna Fáil policy, without criticism of their own record in the past and their role in the present.

Despite our differences with Militant — we do not believe that the Labour Party can ever become a genuine socialist party and a vehicle for socialist revolution — we do not believe that the Labour Party can ever become a genuine socialist party and a vehicle for socialist revolution

With the major trade unions affiliated to the Labour Party, the witch-hunt is an issue of importance to the working class and socialist movement as a whole, and not just to Labour Party members. Militant however want to limit any campaign in their own defence to the Labour Party. True, they say that any campaign must win statements of support from trade union and community groups — but they reject the perspective of involving delegates from these bodies and other socialist organizations in an open

democratic campaign. As with the rest of their politics, their strategy for fighting the witch-hunt, comes down to "Join the Labour Party!"

Militant are telling their supporters that the right-wing "can never expel ideas", and that any members expelled would be vindicated, and welcomed back to the party in due time. This amounts to a false consolation when the real task is to act decisively now to prevent expulsions. To tell their supporters to wait around to rejoin re-formed branches is not good enough. To generalize this in the event of the purge becoming more widespread is a recipe for leaving their supporters open to cruel demoralization. No, a fightback needs to be launched NOW.

Campaign

An open democratic campaign needs to be launched to begin to build a real fight against the witch-hunt. Three other left groups sent people to the Militant's 'Rally for Socialism'. Yet amazingly, coming as it did only one week after the three branches were dissolved, Militant had not planned for an open discussion as to how to fight the witch-hunt! As a result only the Irish Workers' Group spoke from the floor. In

supporting Militant against the witch-hunt, we also criticized their lack of a strategy, and we called instead for the launching of an open democratic campaign. So far Militant have only indicated that they plan to hold a fringe rally at the party's annual conference in February.

But how can a campaign be built? The first thing that needs to be done is to convene an open democratic meeting of delegates from all left groups, trade union, student and community groups willing to defend Militant. Such a committee must plan a campaign to win the support of organized trade unionists, students, community activists and socialists. Its aim must be twofold — to openly defend Militant and to expose Spring's empty posturing against the cuts.

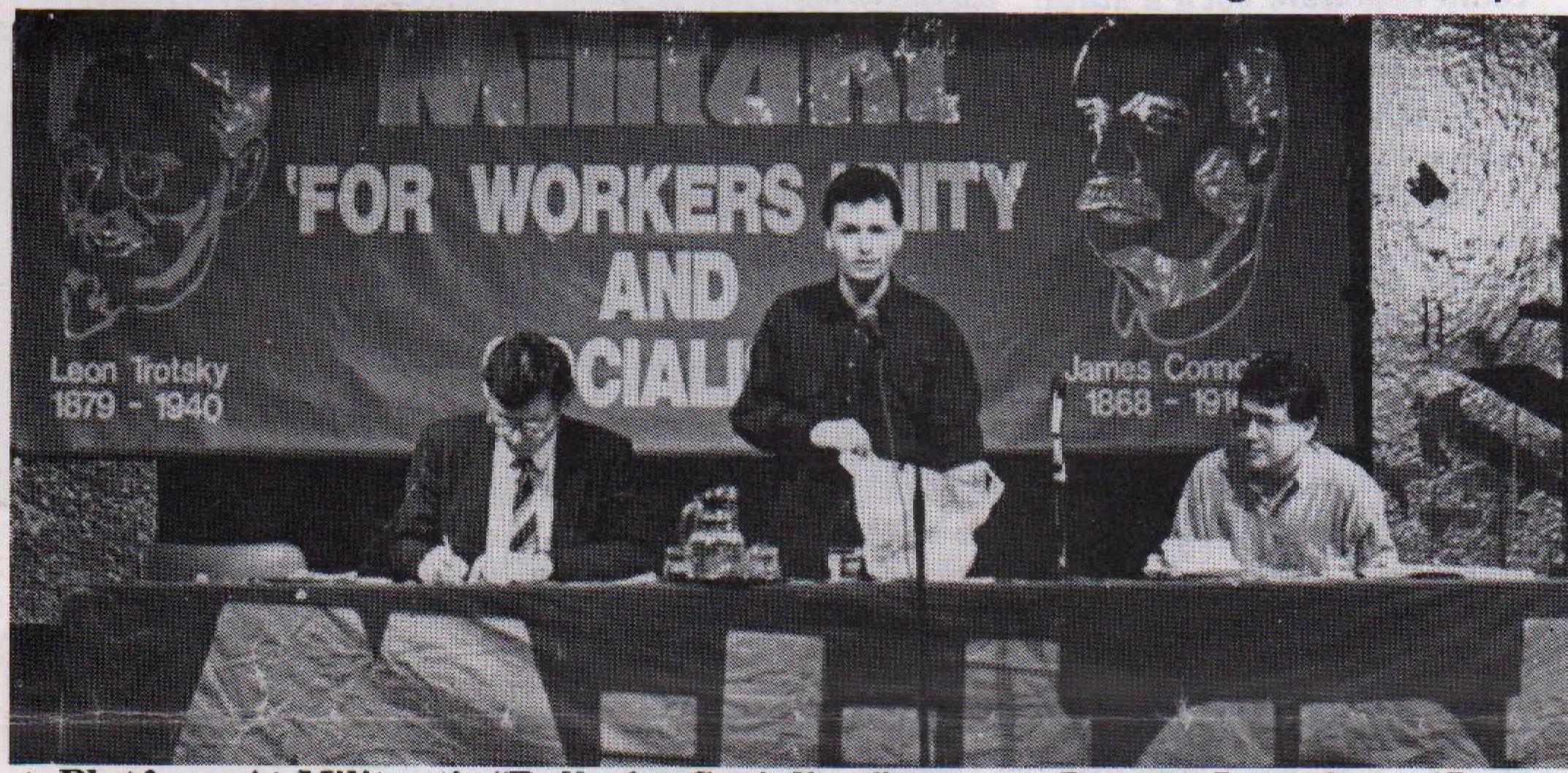
Put Stagg to the test

The call for such a campaign is the only way to force Stagg and his supporters in Labour Left, off the fence. For it was Stagg, after all, who gave the excuse for the moves against the Dublin West branches, when he engineered their suspension in the first place. Even now, despite walking out of the Administrative Council meeting, Stagg hedges on the issue of the witch-hunt. Neither he nor

Labour Left nor Labour Youth have openly called for the re-instatement of the branches. They criticize only the style and manner in which the issue was dealt with. Stagg evades, as he did most noticeably on television, when asked if he supported the expulsion of Militant.

The fight must be to involve the Labour Left, including Stagg's supporters, in any campaign against the witch-hunt. Labour Left say they want democracy in the Labour Party, including the election of the leader. Make them act where that democracy is immediately under threat! A campaign must build on the fact that a number of Labour lefts in Dublin West oppose the witch-hunt — they have been among its victims. Demand that Stagg openly opposes the witch-hunt instead of using it as another hypocritical manoeuvre in his rivalry with Spring for party position.

- Oppose the witch-hunt
- Re-instate the three branches
- For an open, democratic campaign against the witch-hunt and in defence of democracy in the Labour movement.
- Oppose Spring's policies — onto a war footing against Fianna Fáil and the bosses offensive.



▲ Platform At Militant's "Rally for Socialism"

PHOTO BY DEREK SPEIRS / REPORT

THE VICTORY OF Senator David Norris at the European Court of Human Rights on the 26th of October is a landmark ruling against the Southern state's criminalization of male homosexuality. In order now to turn this ruling into a tangible gain it is vital that the Labour movement, and lesbian and gay activists organize to press home the initiative. To adopt a wait and see approach to the response of the Irish government and judiciary would be fatal.

The ruling by the European Court took about eleven years of appeals and counter-appeals, during which the Irish left has tragically refused to openly fight to scrap the anti-gay laws. Preferring to trail behind the initiatives of bourgeois liberal reformers such as Norris, the left have not prepared militants for any initiative or mobilization against the legal apparatus that oppresses gays.

In 1977 the Irish High Court turned down the claim that the 1861, 1862 and 1885 anti-homosexual criminal laws were a violation of human or constitutional rights. Christian ethics were

Scrap Irish Anti-Gay Laws Now!

Appealed to then, and again in the majority ruling of the Supreme Court in April 1983. The ruling class was determined to defend these noxious Victorian laws which allow for life imprisonment for the crime of "buggery". Any suggestion that the European Court ruling on this violation of human rights would lead to a rapid correction of the law and the granting of equality with heterosexuals should be taken with a fistful of salt.

DEEP HOSTILITY

We should remind ourselves that only one month before the Supreme Court anti-gay ruling in 1983, the Central Criminal Court in Dublin gave a mere slap on the wrist to five men, who had in September 1982 left Declan Flynn dead in Fairview Park after going on a "queer-bashing" outing. In a chilling judgement, Justice

Séan Gannon told the defendants, "Apparently your decision was made with some degree of hate, and there is no doubt about your assessment of the situation.... unfortunately it has transpired from the evidence that this was not an isolated incident, but hopefully it will be the last". Some hope!

The Fairview case highlights the deep-rooted hostility to gay men and lesbians in Ireland. Any idea that the politicians of Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael or so-called Progressive Democrats will champion the fight for equality for lesbians and gays in law and in social life should be knocked on the head. It was surprising indeed to hear David Norris express the hope on the radio that the Irish legislature would adopt a "more civilized" approach to lesbians and gays than the British did with their 1967 reforms. Some hope!

No, there is no prospect of enlightened laws from that quarter. Though there are indeed gay people in prominent places in the political establishment, the Irish ruling class knows which side their bread is buttered on when matters of sexual behaviour and orientation are concerned. For capitalism in general, but particularly in religion-dominated Ireland, the "defence of the family" as a bastion of social order and conservatism demands the oppression of women and the rigid regulation of heterosexual marriage as the only legitimate form of sexuality. Hence homosexuality is anathematized.

Reactionary religious propaganda, north and south propagates the lie that homosexuality is unnatural, a perversion and so on. It provides ammunition for the "queer-bashers". It gives credence to the vile cant that

**Irish
Workers
Group**

Class Struggle

gay laws must centrally build in the labour movement through organized caucuses of gays and lesbians and wider committees for action in the unions. All militants must be appealed to for a fight to mobilize labour movement support —

- For the unconditional repeal of the 1861, 1862 and 1885 legislation criminalizing homosexuality.
- For full equality of lesbians and gays with heterosexuals before the law and their defence against harassment or attack.
- Against restrictions being imposed along the lines of the British 1967 reforms which confined to sexual encounters between consenting adults in private. This has led to an increase in convictions and legal harassment of lesbians and gays in Britain.
- Repeal all censorship and obscenity laws which prevent gay literature being read in Ireland.
- In the unions, tenants associations, student bodies etc. for debate and education in defence of gay rights.
- Teachers and school student organizations must challenge the stranglehold of clerical school bosses by demanding open, scientific and secular sex education.
- Trade unions must defend lesbian and gay workers from discrimination or attack, and educate their membership in defence of gay rights.

The campaign against anti-